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June 4, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC

Dear President Obama:

I write in regards to the agenda for your meeting with President Xi Jin Ping of China later this week from June 7-8, 2013. Last week I took my first trip to Beijing as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia and the Pacific. I am pleased to see that you and President Xi have committed to building a positive bilateral relationship, which will allow the United States and China to pursue cooperative solutions to regional and global challenges. The United States and China are well poised to work together on global climate change and environmental issues, especially given Beijing's remarkably poor air quality; to promote positive progress on North Korea denuclearization; and to ensure robust implementation of sanctions against Iran. I encourage your discussion to advance these issues, as positive signs of the evolving U.S.-China bilateral relationship. I encourage you to also use this opportunity to urge President Xi to adhere to a maritime security code of conduct that would respect the right of transit, avoid military action, and promote dialogue to resolve maritime territorial disputes.

The timing of the summit, just days after the June 4th anniversary of the violent crackdown on political dissidents at Tiananmen Square, presents an important opportunity for an open and honest dialogue regarding China's respect for universally accepted human rights norms as an important component of our bilateral relationship. China has made tremendous economic strides by lifting millions of people out of poverty. During my May 25-28 visit to Beijing, Chinese officials stressed that this economic progress has advanced human rights. It is certainly true that economic opportunity is a core tenet of human dignity. However, in China this prosperity has underscored the vast divide between the "have's" and the "have not's", and it has not translated into improved quality of life for the vast majority of Chinese citizens. The government's clamp down on fundamental freedoms limits the innovation and creativity required for true sustainable growth.

President Xi has acknowledged China's rising tide of popular support for legal and political reform, noting prior to taking office in February 2012 that "the government takes

seriously people's aspirations and demands." I met with civil rights lawyers and defenders, as well as religious minority leaders during my trip and they acknowledged President Xi's stated commitment to reforms to combat corruption, and to possibly address key policies on forced labor and migration. Despite President Xi's promising rhetoric, the Chinese government continues its heavy-handed crackdown on civil society.

The civil rights lawyers described a society in which legal rights are guaranteed under the Constitution, but rule of law remains elusive. They discussed the consequences of taking on politically sensitive cases. The penalties range from administrative challenges such as having their law office leases terminated or being unable to renew their licenses, to being unlawfully detained by local authorities, beaten by plain-clothed agents, or sentenced to prison. The rights activists called for complete abolition of China's notorious "Re-education Through Labor" system in which hundreds of thousands of individuals, including rights defenders, are held under administrative detention for up to four years without trial, noting that any reforms would be purely cosmetic. The activists were also concerned by vague proposals to reform China's household registration system, which links government services to the birthplaces of citizens or their parents. The system deprives China's estimated 150 million migrant workers and their children of social welfare protections, such as unemployment, medical, and education benefits. Wealthy Chinese citizens are reportedly permitted to circumvent the registration system by compensating corrupt local authorities. Local officials are also able to capitalize on the construction boom that accompanied China's economic growth by forcibly evicting families and farmers from prime property. President Xi's anti-corruption campaign should include safeguards to shield Chinese citizens from corruption, including measures to ensure equal rights for migrants and guidelines for evictions based on internationally recognized standards.

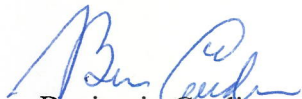
I was particularly struck by China's suppression of religious freedom and minority rights. As you know, the Department of State has defined China as a "country of concern" on religious freedom for thirteen consecutive years. Chinese authorities seek total state oversight over religious doctrine, appointment of religious leaders, registration of religious groups and construction of sites of worship. Banned religions such as underground Protestant house churches and Roman Catholics risk harassment, detention, imprisonment, and violent persecution. Recognized religious minorities, including Tibetan Buddhists and Muslim Uighurs, are subjected to increasingly expansive government controls on their religious life, such as heightened official and security presence in their places of worship, restrictions on religious practices, limited movement, and serious human rights abuses.

Freedom of expression remains an ongoing struggle for all of China's citizens. The government's latest moves on internet censorship- a December 2012 law requiring those who apply for an Internet or mobile service account to use their real names and related legislation calling for service providers to delete posts that are deemed illegal- provide discouraging evidence of this trend. Press freedoms are also suppressed, as evidenced by China's blockage of the New York Times and Bloomberg News websites.

I am hopeful that your summit with President Xi will usher in a new era of U.S.-China engagement and cooperation, while also fostering constructive and honest dialogue on human rights and civil liberties issues. It is an important opportunity to forge a closer working

relationship with China, to encourage President Xi to make meaningful progress on his proposed reforms, and to take further steps to abolish China's most egregious policies. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Cardin", is positioned above the printed name.

Benjamin Cardin
United States Senator